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TAGS: [GM](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [ZB](#)

SUBJECT: GERMANY REASSURES THE BALTS TO INCREASE MANEUVER
ROOM WITH RUSSIA

REF: BERLIN 806

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Stan Otto for reason
s 1.4 (c) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Germany continues to regard proposed NATO contingency planning to defend the Balts against possible Russian aggression as counterproductive and unnecessary, but it has gone out of its way in recent months to take other measures to reassure the Balts that it takes their security concerns seriously. Germany has again volunteered to head the NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission, and Defense Minister Jung made an unprecedented trip to all three countries in early June. The German MFA and MOD hope these and other measures will assuage Baltic fears sufficiently to allow German initiatives in drawing Russia closer to NATO to go forward. The MFA sees an opportunity to deepen security cooperation, even on missile defense given increased Russian concern regarding Iran. Overall, Germany recognizes that working with Russia is difficult, but hopes that U.S. efforts to improve relations along with increased NATO-Russian cooperation will move Russia further along the path to becoming a reliable international partner. END SUMMARY.

REACHING OUT

¶2. (C) While the MFA and MOD offices responsible for the Baltic countries and NATO do not characterize it as such, Germany appears to have undertaken a deliberate effort in recent months to demonstrate to the Balts that it takes their security concerns seriously. It has volunteered again to head the NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission, beginning August 31, which involves the deployment of four fighter aircraft to Lithuania. Everyone recognizes that the aircraft themselves could do little against a Russian attack, but Germany hopes the Balts see them as a symbol of German (and NATO) commitment to Article 5. Given the extreme economic troubles in the Balts, the German MOD expects this commitment to last several more years, as the countries are unlikely to be able to afford their own aircraft anytime soon.

¶3. (C) Another indication of German efforts to build bridges to the Balts was Defense Minister Jung's unprecedented trip to all three countries in early June to discuss how to increase security cooperation. During the four-day trip, Jung not only met his counterparts, but with the presidents of all three countries as well. For the most part, the visit was about building upon an already robust relationship, which has included German training and exchange programs for hundreds of Baltic troops in recent years.

THE WORRIES AND HOPES

¶4. (C) Although MFA Head of Northern Europe Division Thomas Terstegen argues that the Baltic states are less concerned about Russian aggression than they were last fall in the immediate aftermath of the war in Georgia, contacts recognize that the fundamental apprehension regarding Russia will not disappear soon. MFA Deputy Head of NATO Division Gunnar Denecke wondered whether the July 16 open letter to the U.S.

signed by former Central and Eastern European leaders -- along with Swedish Defense Minister Tolgfors July 3 comments regarding the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy -- would cause the Balts to become more suspicious of Russian intentions.

¶5. (C) The MFA considers the efforts of "some NATO partners, like the Balts" to stall NATO-Russia Council (NRC) cooperation as an impediment to U.S. efforts to improve relations with Russia. Moreover, the Balts' demand for NATO contingency planning against possible Russian aggression is likely to worry Russia even more, according to the MOD. Even though the Balts are proving troublesome in the NRC, the MFA is equally frustrated by Russia's attempts to block cooperation. The MFA believes the best move Russia could take to improve NRC relations would be to remove (Russian Permanent Representative) Rogozin from Brussels.

¶6. (C) Despite these tensions, the MFA sees a window of opportunity to improve security cooperation with Russia because of growing Russian suspicion of Iran. Looking at the recent G8 Summit statement and conversations from German-Russian consultations in July, the MFA thinks Russia may be willing to cooperate more with NATO vis-a-vis Iran, perhaps even on missile defense (MD). Although the MFA acknowledges that it would be a hard sell, they do not consider it a lost cause.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The Germans are well-aware that their attempts to accommodate and reach out to the Russians are viewed with suspicion by many countries in eastern Europe. Defense

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Minister Jung's trip to the Baltic countries, Germany's participation in the NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission and Steinmeier's joint visit to Ukraine with Polish FM Sikorski (reftel) are all aimed at reassuring the Balts and other east Europeans that Berlin takes their security concerns seriously. The German calculation is that these efforts will give them more freedom to draw Russia closer to NATO without incurring automatic opposition from the new Allies. The Germans are also hoping to forestall moves that they feel would be counterproductive to the development of closer NATO-Russia relations, particularly NATO contingency planning oriented specifically against possible Russian aggression. On MD, the Germans seem to be betting that in the end, we will decide to pursue some kind of system to protect European allies and forward-deployed U.S. forces against missile threats. As a result, they are urging the Russians to keep an open mind about MD so that this issue does not derail overall NATO-Russia cooperation down the road. End Comment.
Bradtko